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A SERVICE OF BAPTISM,  
CONFIRMATION, AND RENEWAL

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

An Alternate Text 1976  
**Introduction, Text,  
Commentary, and Instructions**

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A SERVICE OF BAPTISM,  
CONFIRMATION, AND RENEWAL  
The United Methodist Church  
An Alternate Text 1976  
Introduction, Text, Commentary, and Instructions

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# INTRODUCTION

## *The Nature of Baptism*

Baptism is an outward sign of our new life in Jesus Christ. Through the sacrament of baptism God declares that he has adopted us as his children, making us fellow heirs of his riches (Gal. 4:4-7; Rom. 8:14-17). Or to use another New Testament metaphor, God declares that we are citizens of Christ's kingdom—"a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (I Peter 2:9).

Baptism is a means which God uses to assure us that we are no longer strangers or visitors to his kingdom but rather fellow citizens with the saints and members of his household, the foundation of which is the apostles and prophets with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:19-20). Hence this sacrament of initiation into the Christian faith is not a minor and insignificant rite of the Church; instead it is a visible way of proclaiming the gospel. The Good News has to do both with God's active grace on our behalf and our active response to him.

God brings us into his family by his own action. Jesus reminded his disciples that they had not chosen him but were chosen by him (John 15:16); for it is God who calls and saves us. Our entrance into the Christian family through baptism is an indication that we do not become God's people because we are deserving but because he is gracious.

God's love revealed in the sacrament of entrance is the same love which has been at work from the beginning of time. Through the physical element of baptismal water, God presents to us the story of eternal, saving love. He brings to our attention his first action in the creation of the world: he moved across the dark waters of chaos and called forth light. Through the water of the sacrament God also reminds us that in the time of Noah he called into the ark a remnant of his creation, thus saving his living creatures from destruction by the water. God further reminds us in baptism that he called his enslaved people out of Egypt and in the Exodus led them through the water of the sea to freedom.

Numerous other biblical stories tell of God's saving action in the presence of water; all of these are brought to mind in baptism but none so strongly as Creation, Deluge, and Exodus. The water of initiation presents to us our heritage, the story of the family which we join by divine grace. And this story culminates in Jesus Christ, who is the head of God's family, the Church. Jesus was himself baptized by John. At his baptism he received the assurance of God's love: "You are my beloved Son" (Mark

1:11). Jesus Christ is God's Son by nature; we are made God's children by adoption. What unites us is the divine love which permeates everything.

But there is another side to be considered. The Good News involves not only God's active grace on our behalf but also our active response to him. When we are called into God's fellowship, we are also commissioned to serve him. Our status as children of God and as citizens of the kingdom does not bestow upon us special privileges; on the contrary, it places upon us special responsibilities. Jesus told his disciples not only that he had chosen them but that he also had appointed them to "go and bear fruit" and "to love one another" (John 15:16, 17).

Because God is gracious, he seeks the salvation of all of his people, not just some of his people. And to those who have received his saving love through faith he gives the task of seeking out others, sharing the Good News, and living in righteousness with all people. Through baptism God reveals what he expects of us, as well as what he does for us. We respond in love.

Baptism therefore is in the nature of a covenant. In the biblical tradition, God binds himself to his people through a covenant promise; those who are bound to him respond by promising to be faithful. But there is not a separate or individual covenant made afresh each time the sacrament is administered; rather, the baptismal covenant is an expression and indication of God's covenant which Christ sealed with his own sacrifice (Heb. 9:11-22).

Baptism is not a contract which God negotiates with each person separately according to the whim or circumstances of the moment; baptism is an affirmation of what God has done for all of us in Jesus Christ. Through the sacrament, God gives us the assurance that the promise of the universal covenant applies to us personally, and we accept our responsibility to participate in the covenant obligations together with all other Christians.

Because of the nature of this covenant, we are united not only to God but to his whole Church. We are also united to a particular congregational unit of that Church. We are not initiated merely into a denomination; we are made members of Christ's holy Church. Differences of opinion and practice among Christians are differences within the family, not differences among unrelated families. All who trust in Christ are our brothers and sisters in the faith. The visible expression of this corporate nature of the Church is the local community of faith. A specific congregation of Christians is a representative of the whole Church and is the fellowship within which we grow and work. Therefore, the presence of the congregation at the time of the administration of the sacrament is important as an expression of this reality.

The practice of baptizing infants and children grows out of the covenantal nature of the sacrament. The baptism of those who cannot yet outwardly respond is a potent reminder to the whole Church that God initiates the covenant. As Paul reminded the Romans, God reached out to us and acted in Christ "while we

were yet helpless" (Rom. 5:6). Our obedience to God is a response to his love freely offered; we do not serve him in order to earn his love.

At the same time, the initiation of those who cannot yet make a profession of faith emphasizes the corporate nature and responsibility of the covenant people. Always the congregation takes responsibility for the nurture and support of the newly baptized; but when these persons are infants or children, the necessity of providing opportunities for growth and fellowship is more apparent. Thus the community is reminded of its obligation.

The baptism of infants and children can occur only within the covenant framework. Missionaries cannot go into an area where there is no Christian congregation and begin baptizing babies; but once a congregation of believers is established, the children of the faithful are not regarded as little pagans until they attain a certain age of enlightenment and spiritual insight. Rather, they are to be seen as heirs of the covenant; the statement of Peter on the day of Pentecost that "the promise is to you and to your children" is an important insight into the nature of the covenant community (Acts 2:39). The Church provides the spiritual home within which children learn the meaning of their baptism and are given opportunities to respond in faith.

Traditionally there have been three ways in which baptism is administered; each indicates something of value about the nature of the sacrament. Sprinkling is a reminder that in Christ, God has fulfilled the promise an-

nounced by Ezekiel: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness. . . . A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:25-26). Immersion is a symbol of burial and resurrection and a reminder that we have been buried with Christ in baptism in order that we might be raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). The pouring of water upon those being baptized signifies the New Testament gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, recalling the words of Joel: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28; cf. Acts 2:17). While only one manner of baptism is used on a particular occasion, all three taken together witness to the nature of the sacrament: God cleanses us from sin and brings us to newness of life through the death and resurrection of Christ; by the power of the Holy Spirit he puts within us a new heart that we may serve him faithfully. Through baptism God's active grace on our behalf calls forth our active response to him in a covenant of faith.

#### *Baptism in Relation to Confirmation and Renewal*

Since baptism is first of all God's promise to us that we are a part of his family, the sacrament is administered only once to each person; for the promises of God are trustworthy, and birth or adoption into a family occurs but once. To ask that God should repeat his

sacramental promise is to cast doubt upon his word and upon our status as his people.

Nevertheless there are occasions when doubts will arise within us about our relationship to God; and there are occasions when God's love is experienced with such new warmth and clarity that some public testimony of his grace is desired and appropriate. At such times it is possible to renew the baptismal covenant. In this act of renewal we are reminded of what God has faithfully promised, and we reaffirm our own commitment to him.

For those who have been baptized as infants or children, there is a significant first occurrence of such renewal, commonly called "confirmation." The title is appropriate on two counts: First, in this rite, God confirms his promise to those who were too young to understand that promise at the time of their baptism. Second, these persons confirm their personal commitment in a public testimony they were unable to make as infants or children. Through this double confirmation, faith and dedication are strengthened.

Two unfortunate practices have grown up with respect to confirmation, however; and both need careful examination. First, it has been assumed that even those being baptized as youths or adults must participate in the rite of confirmation in order to make a full profession of faith. Thus it has frequently happened that on the same day persons had been baptized (or only a few days later) they were also asked to "renew" their baptismal vows. At best, such practices involve needless duplication; at worst,

they violate the integrity of the baptismal rite itself. Therefore, when persons are baptized as youths or adults, no separate act of confirmation is necessary or desirable.

One exception should be noted. When someone has received baptism outside of a congregational service of worship because of exceptional circumstances, it is appropriate that as soon as possible this person should make a public affirmation in the presence of the congregation; this affirmation could take the form of the confirmation rite.

The second unfortunate practice concerning confirmation grows out of the assumption that the baptismal covenant should be renewed only once during an entire lifetime. While the first act of renewal by those baptized in infancy is extremely important, its importance should not blind us to the need for reaffirmation at other times. For although God does not forget his promises to us, we do tend to forget them; and in times of stress we may doubt the truth of his promises even if we do not forget their existence. Furthermore, we frequently neglect the obligations placed upon us in the baptismal covenant. For these reasons it is appropriate for every Christian to renew the baptismal covenant from time to time.

For the sake of clarity and tradition, the term "confirmation" should be reserved for the first renewal of the baptismal faith made by those who received the sacrament during infancy or childhood. To this historic rite, however, two other categories should be added: special renewal (on the part of specific individuals) and

general renewal (by the entire worshiping assembly of baptized persons).

Special renewal can occur for a variety of reasons. The following are examples: (a) Those who have not taken their baptismal obligations seriously may wish to renew their commitment; this has usually been called "reaffirmation of faith" on the part of inactive persons. (b) Persons transferring membership into a congregation (whether from another United Methodist congregation or from another denomination) may wish to make a public testimony to their faith in the presence of the fellowship to which they come. Such a renewal neither discounts their membership status nor their personal commitment prior to this time. It does provide an opportunity for witness not available in the mere presentation of a formal letter of transfer. (c) Similarly, persons establishing affiliate or associate membership in a congregation may be encouraged to make their faith known through a service of renewal. (d) Frequently some form of public testimony and thanksgiving is desired by persons who have reached a new level of commitment or a heightened awareness of God's grace through an experience such as conversion, rededication of life, or an awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit. Since all such experiences grow out of the very grace which baptism signifies, it is particularly fitting that these persons should make a special renewal of the baptismal covenant in the presence of the congregation.

The other category, general renewal, involves all baptized persons present in the

worshiping community. It is true that a congregation has an opportunity to renew its baptismal faith each time the sacrament of baptism is administered in its midst; for this reason, congregational participation in the baptismal service is important, particularly in those parts of the vows affirming faith in God the Father, his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Congregations should be aware that at the same time God declares his promise to individuals being baptized he is reminding those already baptized of the promise he has given them in the sacrament. But it is also fitting for general renewal to occur at times when baptism itself is not actually being administered.

Two occasions in the Christian Year particularly lend themselves to the general renewal of the congregation: (1) the Sunday after the Epiphany [January 6], which is known as the Sunday of the Baptism of the Lord, and (2) the Easter Vigil or another time within the season of Easter. The Baptism of the Lord is an appropriate time for general renewal since it recalls the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan; the renewal theme is reinforced by the fact that this occasion happens to fall at the beginning of the secular calendar year, a natural period of examination and renewed commitment to tasks ahead. Easter is also an appropriate occasion for renewal since through the sacrament we die and are buried with Christ that we might be raised with him to new life. At Easter there is particular emphasis on the Exodus motif in the baptismal liturgy. This is because the Lord's death and resurrection occurred in the midst of

the Passover season and early Christians understood Christ to be the new Moses who leads his people up from the slavery of sin and death.

The basic text of *A Service of Baptism, Confirmation, and Renewal* follows this introduction. Then follows a commentary on the text and general instructions. To the left of the basic text are numbers which correspond to the text's subdivision headings; separate elements under each heading are identified by letters. This system of numbers and letters facilitates references to the basic text in the sections of the book which follow.

## COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT

The heading of the text of the *Service* indicates three important things about its nature.

First, this is a unified text which may be used on a variety of occasions.

- (1) The baptism of infants and children.
- (2) The baptism of youth and adults.
- (3) Confirmation.
- (4) Special (individual) renewal.
- (5) General (congregational) renewal.
- (6) Combinations of the above occasions.

Only slight modifications of the text are required to make it useful in nearly every circumstance related to the baptismal covenant.

Second, the text is intended for use within a service of congregational worship. It is not an independent service which can stand alone, nor should it be used without the presence of the worshiping congregation. While no specific instruction is given concerning where *A Service of Baptism, Confirmation, and Renewal* should be inserted into an order of worship, it would most naturally follow the sermon. *A Service of Baptism, Confirmation, and Renewal* is available in quantity for use in local churches.

Third, the *Service* is one of the alternate rituals of The United Methodist Church. It does not supplant the 1964 texts (pages 7-14 in *The Book of Worship*; Nos. 828 and 829 in *The Book of Hymns*). Nor is it a service for trial use which is being tested as a possible replacement for the earlier services. Instead it makes possible a choice of texts, a genuine alternative. Both the 1964 texts and this alternate text conform to the requirements for membership in our denomination as prescribed in *The Book of Discipline*. The alternate text, however, does contain a renewal of the baptismal covenant which may be used on occasions other than confirmation. This feature has no parallel in the 1964 *Book of Worship* or its antecedents. To this extent *A Service of Baptism, Confirmation, and Renewal* provides an additional set of rites as well as an alternate set.

An item-by-item commentary on the *Service* follows. Numbers and letters used here correspond to those in the left margins on pages iii-vii.

## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICE

Suitable for every occasion on which the *Service* is used.

When there are individual candidates for baptism or renewal, they (together with sponsors, if any) assemble near the font or other suitable place before this introduction is read. This gathering may include family members and representatives of the congregation. Where space permits, the entire congregation may gather with the candidates.

## **2. PRESENTATION OF CANDIDATES**

Used only when there are individual candidates for baptism, confirmation, or other special renewal.

The presentation may be made by the lay leader or other representative of the congregation designated for this responsibility.

When candidates for baptism are infants or children, both their names and the names of their parents and sponsors may be mentioned. [Example: "Jean Ann, daughter of Mary and Allen Smith"]

## **3. DECLARATION OF REPENTANCE AND COMMITMENT**

[A] Suitable for every occasion on which the *Service* is used.

These questions are to be answered by candidates old enough to answer for themselves and by parents and other sponsors. They may also be answered by the whole congregation, thus emphasizing the corporate nature of our faith, which places an obligation to provide Christian nurture upon members of the local church family.

The portions of these vows set in brackets are to be used when the vows are being answered by parents or other sponsors, or by the whole congregation.

Sponsors are necessary when children being baptized are too young to answer for themselves, and such children are normally sponsored by their parents. In some situations other persons in addition to, or even instead of, parents serve as sponsors.

It is not necessary to have sponsors for

persons who are able to answer for themselves, but congregations may elect to provide specific sponsors for them.

[B] When the congregation does not answer the preceding vows, this invitation may be extended to the full congregation. It is appropriate for the worshipers to rise for the affirmation [C] and to remain standing through the end of the Thanksgiving Over the Water [4].

[C] When the full text of these three responses is used, this profession of faith is an interrogative form of the Apostles' Creed. This creed in its most ancient form was designed for use in this way on the occasion of baptism. When pastoral considerations make it necessary, the material in brackets may be omitted. While the shorter answers fulfill the requirements of *The Book of Discipline*, the fuller text is a desirable expression of the historic and universal faith of the Christian Church.

#### 4. THANKSGIVING OVER THE WATER

Suitable for every occasion on which the service is used.

Water may be poured into the baptismal font just prior to this prayer. An ample quantity should be used in order that the congregation may both see and hear the water as it flows into the font. This action aids Christians in their appreciation of the gracious use God makes of his physical world; for it is in the nature of sacraments to reveal God's love through the use of material substances which appeal to our senses.

Congregational participation in the responsive portions of this prayer is urged. Where it is impractical for the congregation to join in the responses, the first two should be omitted ("Sing to the Lord. . . ." and "Declare his works. . . .") together with the opening dialogue ("The Lord be with you." "And also with you.") unless the dialogue is already familiar to the congregation. But even when congregational participation is not possible, the final response ("All praise to you. . . .") should be used, since it forms the conclusion of the prayer.

## 5. ADMINISTRATION OF WATER BAPTISM AND LAYING ON OF HANDS

Used only when there are candidates for baptism.

The traditional question, "What name is given this child?" is omitted in this *Service*. The child's name has already been stated at the time of the Presentation of Candidates [2]. This change reflects our current cultural situation, in which children are named within hours of birth but usually are not presented for baptism until weeks later. Since children come to the font having names, it is not appropriate to pretend they are given their names at the font.

The given name of the candidate is spoken as a part of the baptismal formula. The surname should not be included.

In the act of baptism a generous quantity of water should be used. Since baptism is a sign of God's generous love, and since the physical elements used in sacraments are

intended to reveal this love to us through our senses, it is important that the water be seen, heard, and felt, regardless of the mode of baptism being employed.

Among those who place hands upon the newly baptized may be the following persons: minister, parents and other family members, sponsors, lay leader or other representative who has presented the candidate, and others who may be gathered at the font. In particular, when the family unit includes baptized children, these children should be encouraged to share in the act.

## 6. CONFIRMATION AND OTHER RENEWAL OF THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

The words "Remember your baptism and be thankful" are used whenever confirmation or other baptismal renewal is desired, whether on the part of individuals or of the entire congregation. Use of water is not mandatory; when water is used the quantity should be small, as this act is intended only as a reminder of baptism and ought not create the impression of being "rebaptism." For the same reason, the rubric indicates that water should "be sprinkled toward" those making renewal, not directly upon their heads as would be the case in baptism by sprinkling.

The placing of hands upon the head of each person separately, with the words "(Name), the power of the Holy Spirit work within you, . . ." is done only when there are individuals presenting themselves for confirmation or other renewal. These words are

similar to those used after baptism, but the differences which do exist between the two indicate an important theological understanding: baptism is the beginning which cannot be repeated; in renewal God continues that which was begun in the sacrament itself.

For the form of name to be used and suggestions for the laying on of hands, see section five above.

## 7. PROFESSION OR RENEWAL OF FULL MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

This is used with youths or adults just baptized or confirmed, or with those joining a congregation from another denomination. It may be used in other renewals as well.

Persons being received into associate membership, whose primary membership is in a congregation of another denomination, may wish to use the following modified form of the vow: "As *members* of Christ's universal Church and of (*denomination*), will you work within The United Methodist Church, participating in its mission by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service; and as *associate members* of this congregation, will you do all in your power to effect fellowship and ministry in this community?" "**I will.**"

## 8. COMMENDATION AND WELCOME

Used in all cases except general (congregational) renewal.

When infants and children have been baptized, it should be understood that both

they and their sponsors are being commended and welcomed.

The verbal response of the congregation may be followed by a gesture of welcome and support.

## **GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

The United Methodist Church recognizes all Christian baptism, regardless of the age at which it was administered, the mode employed, or the denominational affiliation of the person administering the rite. When a person is known to have been baptized previously it is imperative that the sacrament not be repeated. "Rebaptism" calls into doubt the promise God extended at the reception of the sacrament. It also calls into question our respect for other Christian churches and ministers and betrays a lack of concern for the unity of Christ's holy Church through baptism.

If there is uncertainty as to whether a person has been baptized, and if neither records nor witnesses can be found, baptism may be administered conditionally using these words: "(Name), if you are not already baptized, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." "Amen."

Administration of the sacrament should be preceded by prebaptismal instruction for candidates and their sponsors. Congregations are

encouraged to provide study groups and other corporate counseling opportunities in addition to individual consultations by the pastor.

Pastors are urged to exercise responsible sacramental discipline. Baptism may be justifiably deferred or declined when those seeking the rite will not participate in prebaptismal counseling, or when parents or other sponsors proposed for infants and children are not themselves committed members of Christ's Church.

A pastor should also defer baptizing anyone who has been refused this rite by another Christian pastor until the latter has been contacted and reasons for the refusal have been ascertained and evaluated.

The sacrament is to be administered in the presence of the congregation of which the candidate will be an active member. Pastors are urged to deny requests for private baptismal services, whether held in the church building or elsewhere. Persons who are logically related to a particular local church but request baptism in another local church for reasons of sentiment should be referred to their own congregations and pastors for the rite.

On rare occasions, emergency baptism may be pastorally justified if those requesting it urgently need outward and visible reassurance of God's grace. Persons who recover from illness after emergency baptism should be presented to the local congregation; at such times the rite of renewal may be appropriate (See pages 10-15). In any event, the congregational welcome should be extended (No. 8 in

the *Service*). Any persons receiving emergency baptism should later receive the benefit of the counseling which normally would precede the rite.

Specific suggestions regarding the placement of the font are difficult to make due to the variety of church architecture which exists. Several principles can be stated, however: (1) The font should be in as full a view of the entire congregation as possible. (2) The font should be placed where a group of persons can gather around or in front of it for the administration of the sacrament. (3) The font should always be present in the place of worship as a visible reminder of the centrality of this sacrament; it should not be stored in a closet or relegated to an obscure position at times when baptism is not being administered.

The font should include a bowl or basin sufficiently large to hold a generous amount of water. When sprinkling or pouring, the water may be administered with the hand or with the traditional baptismal shell. When the mode is immersion and there is no suitable baptismal pool in the church building, the service may be held out of doors or in the baptismal pool of a neighboring church; members of the candidates' congregation should be encouraged to attend such special services. Where requests for immersion are frequent, this fact should be taken into consideration when church buildings are being designed or renovated, in order that facilities for immersion may be provided in the place where the congregation worships.

Several optional acts may be inserted into the

*Service.* Following the Administration of Water Baptism, if desired, the minister may trace upon the forehead of the baptized person the sign of the cross, the sign of the fish, or both. Olive oil may be used in this action in imitation of the biblical custom of anointing persons with oil in holy rites; such anointing is a reminder that through baptism we are made a part of the priesthood of all believers.

New clothing is sometimes presented to those just baptized, particularly in the case of infants, as a symbol of the new life we have in Christ. A lighted baptismal candle may also be presented to the newly baptized person or to the sponsors. Either of these acts could occur at the conclusion of the Administration of Water Baptism and the Laying On of Hands. Appropriate words such as the following may be used:

Receive these new clothes as a token of the new life which is given in Christ Jesus.

Let your light so shine that *others*, seeing your good works, may glorify our Father in heaven. [When the candle is presented to the sponsors of infants, "*others*" may be changed to "*this child*" or "*these children*."]

A baptismal candle bears either a Christian symbol or no decoration at all; it should not be confused with ornate "birthday candles" sold commercially to mark off the child's birthdays annually, even though the baptismal candle may be lighted in the home each year on the anniversary of baptism as a reminder of the grace of God offered through the sacrament.

If the congregation uses a Paschal candle during the season of Easter, this is relighted at

baptisms and stands near the font. The baptismal candle is then lighted from the Paschal candle. Otherwise the baptismal candle may be lighted from one of the candles on or near the Lord's Table.

The various optional acts suggested above can increase the awareness of the rich meaning in the sacrament of baptism. Care should be taken, however, not to obscure the act of administration itself. Always the use of oil, new clothes, and baptismal candles is secondary to God's sign given in the water itself.

When infants are baptized, a special charge to their sponsors may be included at the end of the Administration of Water Baptism and Laying On of Hands (and following the use of any optional acts such as presentation of new clothes and candles). The charge may be given by the lay leader or other representative of the congregation who has introduced the candidates earlier in the service. Words such as these are suitable:

Now in the strength which the Lord supplies, perform the vows you have made this day. Guide *these children* of God and instruct *them* in the Christian faith, that as *true disciples* they may respond to God's grace and thus fulfill *their ministry*.

Another option which may be employed involves giving opportunity for those who have received the rites to bear witness to their faith or experience in their own words. Such oral testimony may be inserted into the service at a variety of points following baptism or the acts

of renewal. Whether or not such opportunity is extended will depend upon factors such as the number of persons, the amount of time available, and the nature of the congregation. Such testimony is appropriate on occasions of baptism, of confirmation, or other special renewal.

The traditional unity of word and sacrament should be maintained. When possible, the Lord's Supper should be a part of the total service into which *A Service of Baptism, Confirmation, and Renewal* is incorporated. While it is not intended that the minister preach on the meaning of the rites each time they are administered, ample provision should be made in the preaching program to instruct congregations in the nature of baptism and its renewal.

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# A Service of Baptism, Confirmation, and Renewal

For Use Within a Service of Congregational Worship



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
An Alternate Text  
1976

A SERVICE OF BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, AND RENEWAL  
For Use Within a Service of Congregational Worship  
The United Methodist Church  
An Alternate Text 1976

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# A SERVICE OF BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, AND RENEWAL

For Use Within a Service of Congregational Worship

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

An Alternate Text 1976

## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICE

Through the Sacrament of Baptism we are initiated into Christ's holy Church. God incorporates us into his mighty acts of salvation, giving us a new birth by water and the Spirit. All of this is God's gift to us, offered without price. Through confirmation and other renewals of the baptismal covenant, we acknowledge what God is doing for us and affirm our commitment to Christ's Church.

## 2. PRESENTATION OF CANDIDATES

I present (*name [s]*), seeking admission into the Body of Christ through baptism.

I present (*name [s]*) for confirmation.

I present (*name [s]*) for the renewal of the baptismal covenant.

## 3. DECLARATION OF REPENTANCE AND COMMITMENT

[A] New life in Christ is a life of faith which makes itself known through turning from sin and turning to righteousness. Therefore, on behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:

Do you reject the bondage of sin and accept the liberty which God gives you [and do you pledge to encourage *these* whom you sponsor to do the same]?

**I do.**

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and pledge allegiance to the kingdom which he has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?

**I do.**

Will you resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever guises they present themselves [and assist *these* whom you sponsor to recognize and resist them]?

**I will.**

According to the grace given to you, do you promise to lead a Christian life, always to remain faithful members of Christ's holy Church, and to serve as Christ's *representatives* in the world [by word and example teaching *these* whom you sponsor to do the same]?

**I do.**

*If the congregation has not joined in the above vows as an act of renewal, the minister may invite the people to take part in the following affirmation with these words:*

- [B] As members of Christ's holy Church, you are invited to join now with these persons in receiving and professing the Christian faith as contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.
- [C] Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
[He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again  
to judge the living and the dead.]**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
[the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting].**

#### **4. THANKSGIVING OVER THE WATER**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray.

Eternal God:

When nothing existed but chaos,  
you swept across the dark waters  
and brought forth light.

In the days of Noah

you saved those on the ark through water.

After the flood you set in the clouds a rainbow.

When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt,  
you led them to freedom through the sea.

Their children you brought through the Jordan  
to the land which you promised.

**Sing to the Lord all the earth.**

**Tell of his mercy each day.**

In the fullness of time you sent Jesus,  
nurtured in the water of a womb.

He was baptized by John  
and anointed by your Spirit.  
He called his disciples

to share in the baptism of his death and resurrection  
and to make disciples of all nations.

**Declare his works to the nations,  
his glory among all the people.**

By the power of your Holy Spirit,  
bless this gift of water  
and those who receive it.  
Wash away their sin  
and clothe them in righteousness  
as those who have died and been raised with Christ.

**All praise to you, Eternal Father,  
through your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit  
lives and reigns forever. Amen.**

## 5. ADMINISTRATION OF WATER BAPTISM AND LAYING ON OF HANDS

*As the water is administered, the minister says:*

(Name), I baptize you in the name of the Father and  
of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

*As hands are placed on the heads of those receiving  
baptism, the minister says:*

The power of the Holy Spirit work within you, that  
being born of water and the Spirit you may be a  
faithful witness of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

*When all candidates have been baptized, the minister says  
to them:*

Through baptism you are incorporated into Christ's  
New Creation by the power of the Holy Spirit and  
share in Christ's royal priesthood. With joy and  
thanksgiving we welcome you as *members* of the  
universal Body of Christ.

## 6. CONFIRMATION AND OTHER RENEWAL OF THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

*As the minister says the following words, water may be*

*sprinkled toward all persons being confirmed or making other renewal of their baptismal faith:*

Remember your baptism and be thankful. **Amen.**

*As hands are placed upon the head of each person separately, the minister says to each:*

(Name), the power of the Holy Spirit work within you, that having been born of water and the Spirit, you may continue to be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

## 7. PROFESSION OR RENEWAL OF FULL MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*The minister asks those coming into full membership in this congregation of The United Methodist Church:*

As members of Christ's universal Church, will you be loyal to The United Methodist Church, participating in its mission by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service; and as members of this congregation, will you do all in your power to effect fellowship and ministry in this community?

**I will.**

## 8. COMMENDATION AND WELCOME

*The minister then addresses the congregation:*

Members of the family of God, I commend to you these persons. Do all in your power to increase their faith, confirm their hope, and perfect them in love.

We give thanks to God  
for the faith he has worked within you.

We pledge to you  
our Christian love and hospitality  
as fellow stewards of God's grace.

Together with you and all Christians  
we seek the unity of the Spirit  
in the bond of peace,  
that in everything God may be glorified  
through Jesus Christ.

